

HAZARDOUS WASTE FOUND IN ABANDONED BUILDING

SARAH LAMBERT

The Enquirer

MARSHALL TOWNSHIP

— In 2002, a local company went bankrupt. Eight years later, local and federal government agencies are still working to clean up the mess left behind.

Environmental Protection Agency employees have been working since May 11 to identify and dispose of corrosive materials found at the former site of Midwest Metallurgical Laboratory, a local foundry, or metal-working factory, at 15290 15-Mile Road in Marshall Township. Several EPA workers will continue the cleanup for about three more weeks, said Jeff Lippert, an EPA federal on-scene coordinator.

In order to clean up the mess, masked and suited crews from the EPA have to move the remaining containers to a single site, try to identify the containers' contents, consolidate like materials, excavate contaminated soil, and ship the contaminants to various recycling facilities and landfills.

The process is not cheap, said Tricia Edwards, an EPA on-scene coordinator. Cleanup will cost federal taxpayers about \$200,000. But local governments will suffer even more.

When the company left, it owed the county \$300,000 in taxes, said Calhoun County Treasurer Ann Rosenbaum. Perhaps more urgently, it left 400 drums of unknown liquids and chemicals sitting in its abandoned building.

The materials were tested for acidity in October, Lippert said. Although the EPA hasn't determined the contents of all the drums, it has found some materials to be highly corrosive.

"This makes me hysterical," Rosenbaum said. "You could get all that stuff into the ground and

to the aquifers. Not good."

Along with environmental concerns, there are serious human health risks, Lippert said.

Trespassers looking for a safe haven or looking to salvage copper wiring could knock over oil or other chemicals. Drums of acidic materials also could sit in the sun too long and begin to bulge.

Either scenario might result in an explosion and emergency evacuations, Lippert said.

As alarming as the situation is, it is not unique, he said.

"It's expensive to remove and dispose of this stuff, so that's one of the ways they (companies) save money — by leaving it here and just closing the doors," Lip-

pert said.

Usually, the EPA does attempt to bill the company. But in this case, "the company is gone — defunct," Lippert said. "There's no one to hold responsible for the cleanup costs."

Lippert's region handles 30 to 40 similar cases each year in Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin and Minnesota. And in Calhoun County, hazardous waste usually is found at one abandoned business each year, Rosenbaum said.

"We get referred sites like this all across the state," Edwards said. "All across the country."

Sarah Lambert can be reached at 966-0589 or slambert@gannett.com.

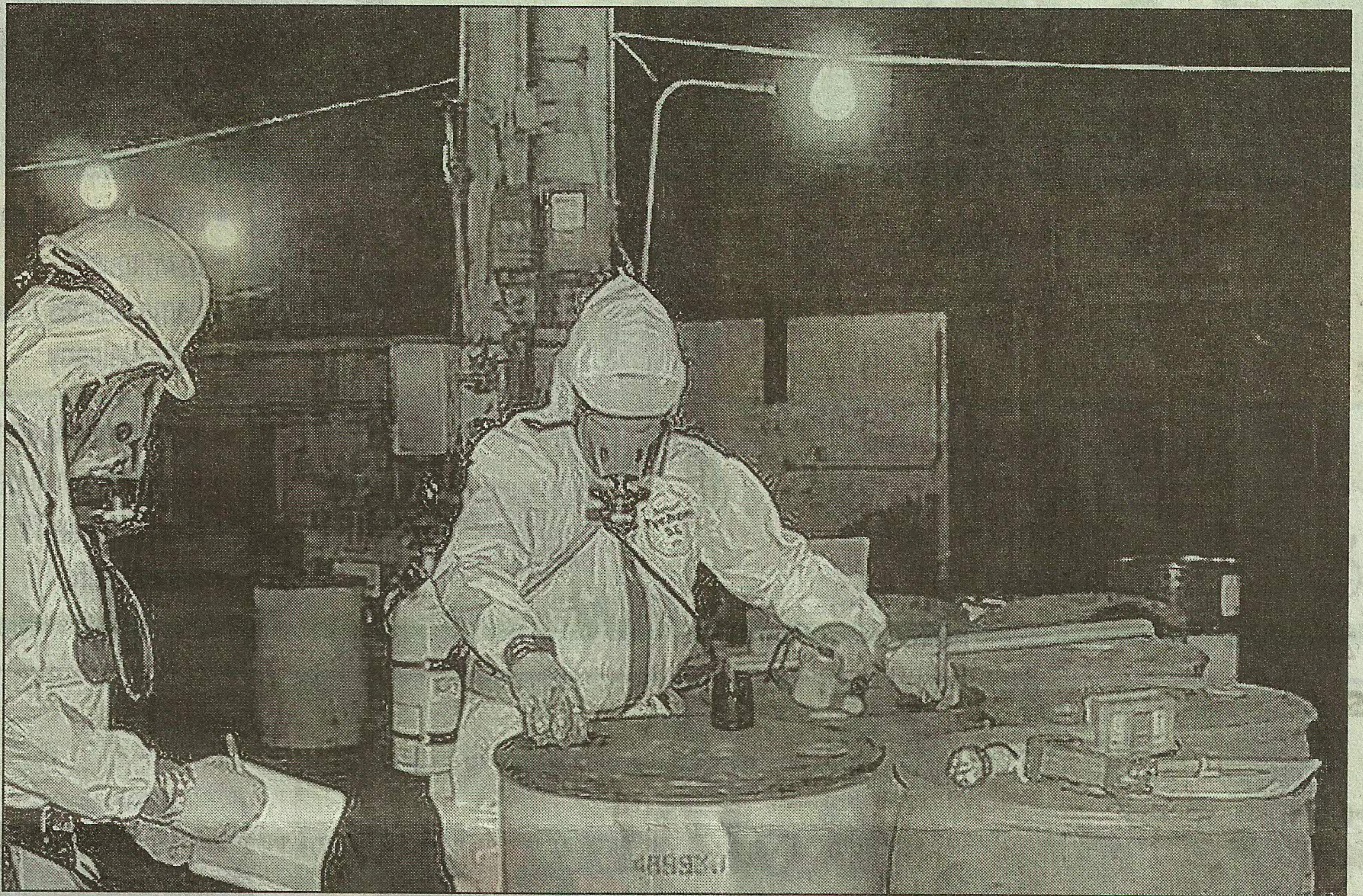


PHOTO PROVIDED BY KEITH KIDDER

Environmental Protection Agency representatives were at the site of the former Midwest Metallurgical Laboratory on Friday sampling the contents of abandoned containers.